

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Joint Audit and Governance Committee
Adur District and Worthing Borough Councils**

QEII Room, Shoreham-Centre, Shoreham-by-Sea

26 September 2024

Councillor Debs Stainforth (Chair)
Councillor Nigel Corston (Vice-Chair)

Adur District Council:

Councillor Caroline Fuhrmann
Councillor Adrienne Lowe
Councillor Andy McGregor
Councillor Carol O'Neal
Councillor Julian Shinn

Worthing Borough Council:

Councillor Dan Hermitage
Councillor Margaret Howard
Councillor Daniel Humphreys
Councillor Nigel Morgan
Councillor Rosey Whorlow
Councillor Jon Roser

Absent

Councillor Mike Barrett

JAGC/21/24-25 Substitute Members

Councillor Jon Roser substituted for Councillor Mike Barrett

JAGC/22/24-25 Declarations of Interest

No Members declared an interest

JAGC/23/24-25 Minutes

Resolved: the minutes of the meeting of the 11 July 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

JAGC/24/24-25 Public Question Time

There were no questions from public

JAGC/25/24-25 Members Questions

There were no questions from Members

JAGC/26/24-25 Items Raised under Urgency Provisions

There were no urgent items

JAGC/27/24-25 Internal Audit Report

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 7, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members and is attached to a signed copy of these minutes.

Members asked about recommendations regarding consent, management responses in time with report submissions, the number of recommendations in each assurance, the timing of the audit reports, the challenges and recommendations around housing and implementation of a tracking system.

Members were informed that recommendations regarding consent were made around 2017/18 and hadn't yet been updated to take into account legislative changes, that when management responses did not arrive in time for report finalisation they were not written off but continue to be followed up; that yes, individual audits could come with numerous recommendations; that the audit reports were published based on the information and responses available at the time; that the auditors were aware of the pressures surrounding housing, which had been in a significant state of flux with a number of roles unfilled but that the trajectory was improving. Members were also informed that a simple system was in place to track and filter progress with the expectation that regular reports could come to committee.

Members went on to discuss the promise of a new tracker for future reports and the number of implemented recommendations. Members were further informed that many authorities faced similar challenges and that the report highlighted areas that needed improving.

Resolved:

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee noted the report.

JAGC/28/24-25 Risks and Opportunities Updates

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 8, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members and is attached to a signed copy of these minutes.

Members asked about staff vacancies, why the Strategic Property Investment Fund (SPIF) appeared as a risk, the flood defences in Shoreham, the rise in the number of complaints and staff training.

Members were informed that alongside the organisational redesign, decisions were being made with regards to vacancies and recruitment and that some positions were proving difficult to recruit. Members were also informed that that SPIF was on the register due to some properties having leases coming up, that flood defences were still due to be completed by the end of winter, that the rise in complaints was not necessarily negative as it could also indicate a more accessible complaints process and that due to a vacancy in the information governance team, recruitment was underway while budget for training someone in that position would be advocated for if necessary.

Resolved:

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee:

- Noted the progress in managing the Risks and Opportunities

- Agreed to a further progress report in March 2025

JAGC/29/24-25 Annual Review of Corporate Complaints and Customer Feedback Report 23/24

The Committee had a report before it, attached as item 9, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members and is attached to a signed copy of these minutes.

Members asked how complaint handling could be measured, the rise in the number of complaints, complaints received from councillors and the potential for independent review.

Members were informed that the rise in complaints was not necessarily negative as it could also indicate a more accessible complaints process, that complaints from councillors were not included in the report as they were treated separately and that two complaints handling members had already been appointed.

Resolved:

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report
- Agreed to continue to support the implementation and compliance of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the work towards the implementation of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

JAGC/30/24-25 Housing Improvement Plan: September 2024 Progress Report

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 10, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members and is attached to a signed copy of these minutes.

Members asked when monitoring by the regulator would be signed off and were told that Council had an aspiration for that to happen within the next two years.

Members went on to discuss the perception of void properties and the number still existing as well as commending the new Assistant Director for their work since arriving in post.

Resolved:

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee noted the good progress being made to ensure that Adur Homes became fully compliant with regulatory standards that led to the self referral to the Regulator for Social Housing and the work underway to significantly transform Adur Homes to ensure residents have safe, secure and sustainable homes.

JAGC/31/24-25 Annual Treasury Management Report 2023-24 for Adur District

Council and Worthing Borough Council

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 11, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members and is attached to a signed copy of these minutes.

Members asked about grant money that had been returned to central government, loans between Adur and Worthing, Member training and the financing of Albion Street.

Members were informed that grant money had been given during the pandemic with specific terms for use, that loans between the two councils were short term, at a market rate and enabled short term gaps in cash flow to be funded; that finance training was being organised for later in the year and that while treasury management was separate from the capital scheme, they did borrow to finance the total cost of the project.

Resolved:

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee noted the annual report

JAGC/32/24-25 Conferment of Honorary Aldermen

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 12, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members and is attached to a signed copy of these minutes.

Members asked if there was additional cost for calling a special meeting and how someone qualifies for receiving the honor. Members were informed that the additional cost was minimal as it was held right before a planned full council meeting and that the requirements were set out in the report with slight differences between qualifying in Adur and Worthing.

Members also went on record to applaud all the good work done by Hazel Thorpe during her time as a councillor and continued to do in the community.

Resolved:

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee:

- Recommended that Worthing Borough Council conferred the title of Honorary Alderwoman to former Mayor, Hazel Thorpe
- Agreed the following recommendation to Worthing Borough Council: "That a special meeting of the Council be arranged under section 249(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 for the specific purpose of conferring the title of Honorary Alderwoman to Hazel Thorpe."
- Recommended that Adur District Council conferred the title of Honorary Alderman to former Chairman Brian Coomber, subject to the Monitoring officer confirming they qualified for the nomination.

JAGC/33/24-25 Amendments to the Constitution

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 13, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members and is attached to a signed copy of these minutes.

Members asked about the definition of 'substantial' within the context and who the adjudicator of council specific issues would be. Members were advised that the meaning of 'substantial' was set out in the amendment, usually decided by which council's budget it came from and that the adjudicator would be the proper officer.

Members went on to discuss how one council should not be able to impose its will on another, the robustness of the amendment, the likelihood of such a disagreement occurring and that it would be impossible to legislate for every situation.

Resolved:

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee:

- Noted the use of the Monitoring Officer's delegation to make minor and inconsequential amendments.
- Endorsed the amendment to the Constitutions proposed by the Monitoring Officer at Paragraph 5 and recommended the proposed amendment to both Full Councils for their approval.

The meeting was declared closed by the Chairman at 8.55 pm, it having commenced at 6.30 pm

Chairman